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## Viewing cable 09ALGIERS370, BOUTEFLIKA REELECTED IN HEAVILY MANAGED CONTEST

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09ALGIERS370**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09ALGIERS370</a>	<a href="#">2009-04-13 19:12</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Algiers</a>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ALGIERS 000370

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/12/2024

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: BOUTEFLIKA REELECTED IN HEAVILY MANAGED CONTEST

REF: A. ALGIERS 337

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 331

[1](#)C. ALGIERS 147

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: To the surprise of noone, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was elected to a third term on April 9 in a carefully choreographed and heavily controlled election with official results the main opposition leader called "Brezhnevian." Interior Minister Nouredine Yazid Zerhouni announced in a press conference on April 10 that a record 74.54 percent of over 20 million eligible voters participated in the election, with Bouteflika receiving 90.24 percent of the votes. Opposition parties and defeated candidates have placed actual turnout figures at between 18 and 55 percent, while informal Embassy observations indicated that the vast majority of polling stations were empty across the capital, with actual turnout at 25-30 percent at most. A joint statement by observer teams from the African Union, Arab League and Organization of the Islamic Conference was quick to proclaim the election "fair and transparent," but UN monitors declined to participate in the statement despite Algerian government pressure to do so. Their concerns, to be presented in a private report to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, illustrate a system in which opposition parties and civil society have their backs against the wall and citizens have little to do with a political process increasingly detached from society. With Bouteflika's hold on power secure, Algeria now faces an urgent need for dialogue between the population and the state, a situation that left the UN monitors deeply worried about what comes next. END SUMMARY.

Bouteflika's "crushing majority"

¶2. (C) Interior Minister Zerhouni officially pronounced President Bouteflika the victor in the April 9 election during a press conference at an Algiers hotel on April 10, closing the final chapter on the President's bid for a third term made possible by the November 12 revision of the constitution that removed presidential term limits. Zerhouni proclaimed that 74.54 percent of Algeria's 20 million registered voters had gone to the polls the preceding day, delivering a landslide victory for the incumbent. After the final vote tally, Zerhouni said Bouteflika landed 90.24 percent of the vote, followed by Worker's Party (PT) candidate Louisa Hanoune with a distant 4.22 percent, the Algerian National Front's (FNA) Moussa Touati with 2.31 percent, El Islah's Djahid Younsi with 1.37 percent, Ali Fouzi Rebaine of Ahd 54 with 0.93 percent, and Mohamed Said of the unregistered Party for Liberty and Justice (PLJ) in last place with 0.92 percent.

¶3. (C) As many observers here predicted before the election (ref A), the official turnout figure has stirred more controversy than the election result itself. Two hours after the polls closed on election day, Zerhouni put turnout at 74.11 percent, revising the number slightly upward the next day. State-run television (ENTV) and the pages of the regime newspaper El Moudjahid ran images depicting crowds of voters queuing outside Algiers polling stations. But anecdotal reports of voter activity suggested Zerhouni's figure to be greatly exaggerated. Some of our local staff noted that the crowds of voters on state media appeared dressed for cold weather, while April 9 was generally warm and sunny, suggesting that officials used archive footage from previous elections. The opposition Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) charged that at several polling stations, the Interior Ministry bussed in loyal voters such as plainclothes police to create an optic that matched the desired turnout result. xxxxxxxxxxxx told us the polling stations he visited with a French journalist were almost empty. In one case, he met an unemployed man who said he was voting because he was told to present his voter card in order to obtain a passport. A woman at another polling station told xxxxxxxxxxxx she was there to visit her daughter, who was a polling official, but she did not intend to vote.

¶4. (C) Opposition parties boycotting the election and the

defeated candidates gave turnout estimates ranging between 18 and 55 percent. xxxxxxxxxxxx told us his party's observers believed 25 percent was a more accurate turnout figure for the capital, compared to the Interior Ministry's claim of 64.76 percent. The foreign ministry had declined to authorize Embassy officers to observe the voting process, but Embassy personnel informally observed voting at

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more than 30 polling stations throughout the capital and saw only a handful of voters trickling in and out during peak voting hours. Some employees were able to get informal statistics from friends or relatives working in polling stations. At a voting bureau in the CEM Pasteur neighborhood of central Algiers, 74 of 214 voters cast ballots, a participation rate of 34 percent. The vote tally counted 48 votes for Bouteflika, 8 for Lousia Hanoune, 5 for Said and one each for Rebaine, Touati and Younsi. Voters spoiled 10 of the ballots cast, generally considered a "vote blanche" or protest vote. At another polling station in the same neighborhood, 85 out of 281 voted with 21 ballots spoiled. These anecdotal percentages mirrored what the UN monitoring team told us on April 11 that they had observed. At a vote count UN monitors attended, 120 of 345 registered voters participated (34 percent); 75 percent of the votes, they said, went to Bouteflika and 20 percent of the ballots were spoiled.

#### Resigned objections

15. (C) Each of the losing candidates expressed public doubts over official turnout figures, while resigning themselves to the outcome. Fouzi Rebaine accused the government of inflating vote figures and said he could easily accept defeat if the numbers were "real." Rebaine threatened to file a complaint with the UN instead of Algeria's national election commission, claiming Algerian institutions connected to the election lacked credibility. Djahid Younsi described the election results as nothing short of "miraculous," and estimated voter turnout was closer to 25 percent. PT candidate Louisa Hanoune believed she actually won at least 30 percent of the vote, and added that the official turnout figure made Algeria look like "a banana republic." The leader of the three-person UN monitoring mission, M.I. Abdool Rahman, told us April 11 that his mission was "quite certain" something was not right after receiving many vague allegations of fraud from opposition parties, but the lack of detail made it impossible to describe with certainty the type of fraud and how it occurred. The most detailed example of vote tampering we received came from an Embassy employee who observed a phone call in which a polling station worker was told by an Interior Ministry official to use an inflated figure for the number of ballots cast during the day. When the polling station closed, Interior Ministry police presented the polling station worker with a vote protocol to sign, featuring a grossly inflated figure and names he simply had not seen during the day.

16. (C) There were other signs of government efforts to manage the optics of the process and keep voices of dissent out of public view. An Embassy officer watched as a soldier in uniform made a young Algerian scrape boycott posters off the exterior wall of the FFS party headquarters in Algiers on the morning of April 10 even before the official announcement of the results. Taking aim at the RCD's campaign to make April 9 "a day of national mourning," Zerhouni said during his April 10 press conference that RCD activists would face justice, particularly for replacing the Algerian flag over their headquarters with a black flag of mourning. His statement apparently cleared the path for a commando raid on RCD headquarters in El Biar, organized by Algiers Mayor Tayeb Zitouni, who led a small group of young men in throwing rocks and attempting to scale the RCD walls to seize the black flag. RCD leader Said Sadi told us on April 11 that the election result was "Brezhnevian" and that RCD members

succeeded in thwarting the April 10 attack.

#### Security incidents

17. (C) There were no major security incidents in the capital (where an exceptionally heavy security presence was visible) but there were reports of isolated violence in other regions across the country. The most serious was a report that a suicide bomber in the town of Boumerdes (30 miles east of Algiers) detonated a bomb in a polling station, killing two police officers. Notably, no voters were harmed in the attack. In Tamait, in the eastern region of Bejaia, two opposing political groups created a scuffle near a polling station that caused an interruption in voting. In Tizi Ouzou, a group of young Algerians boycotting the election rushed into a polling station and destroyed three ballot boxes. When police intervened, one officer was injured by a Molotov cocktail used by one of the youths during the confrontation. In Bouira, a group of young men set fire to a

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polling station. The local press also reported explosions of small bombs in Skikda, Tipaza, Tebessa, Tizi Ouzou and Larbaa Nath Irrathen in the Kabylie region.

#### A heavily managed affair

18. (C) The government's management of pre-election and election-day activities demonstrated a carefully orchestrated strategy to control the process by using complicated procedural rules to maintain the outward appearance of transparency (ref A). The UN's Abdool Rahman told us on April 11 that Algeria's legal framework itself provided room for fraud: "For every concern we raised, the government could point to a rule in the elecTnQ;glfEQUxwQ[action," he said, adding, "We didn't have many good conversations." Abdool Rahman and his colleagues said the primary weakness of the process was the government's credibility as an impartial actor. He noted there was no role for civil society, or consultation with stakeholders outside the government or Bouteflika's administration. Even the institution charged with hearing complaints from candidates and voters, the National Commission for the Surveillance of the Presidential Election (CNES), was formed by the government and its chairman was appointed by President Bouteflika. "Civil society should have been in the lead." Abdool Rahman said he raised these concerns in a conversation with the vice president of the Constitutional Council, who agreed that opposition parties should have had more representation in electoral institutions. Another concern the UN team raised was that candidates, with the exception of Bouteflika, only had access to the media during the official campaign period of March 19 - April 7. Abdool Rahman added that throughout the election boycotting parties were prohibited from speaking up. AU observer Calixte Mbari shared the UN concern with media access: "It's too bad we couldn't be here to see the pre-campaign media environment," he told us, "that would have been interesting."

19. (C) Abdool Rahman said his mission was hindered by the government's effort to control its meetings and use the mission's presence to convey the official election story. He noted that outside of his election-related meetings, he met only with the U.S. and European Union foreign missions during his visits to Algiers, something he said the government actively tried to prevent. Abdool Rahman said Algerian officials forced schedule changes to prevent a meeting at the Embassy during the team's mid-March visit. He remarked that an MFA official even attempted to attend an internal UNDP country team meeting, as well as a private meeting at the French embassy. "We had to politely tell him no," he said. At meetings arranged by the government, team member Tadjoudine Ali-Diabacte said, it was hard to talk to "real" people. He complained that the team was forced to sit

through a staged civil society meeting in Tizi Ouzou and listen to canned statements on the election's fairness. We experienced a similar situation when the Ambassador attempted to sat meet on April 10 with AU Observer Mission leader Joaquim Chissano, former president of Mozambique. After originally agreeing to a 9:15 meeting, the AU team informed us the meeting was moved to 10:00, the same time Zerhouni was expected to deliver the election results. We waited for 15 minutes to see Chissano, only to have an MFA official interrupt the meeting after roughly five minutes to inform Chissano that he was being summoned to attend Zerhouni's press event, which ultimately took place at 1130.

#### Recommendations for the future

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¶10. (C) Abdool Rahman said that his mission would not comment publicly on the election. He noted that the Department's April 10 statement expressing "concern" over the election was "very strong" but added that his team agreed with it. He said that the UN mission's decision to say nothing clearly annoyed the MFA. "They put a lot of pressure on us to make a joint statement with the AU, AL and OIC." Abdool Rahman told us his team would draft a report for UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon that would highlight the problems he discussed as well as positive aspects of the election. Abdool Rahman believed no decision had been made as to how much of the report might be made public, or in what form its recommendations would be transmitted to the Algerians. We advised the UN team that public criticism was generally counterproductive; however, we believed that the government would seriously consider critical comments made in private, even if the criticism was not welcome. Abdool Rahman suggested that USUN New York

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might obtain a copy of the mission's report by contacting the SYG's office directly at some point in the coming weeks.

¶11. (C) Abdool Rahman predicted their recommendations would underscore the need to make progress on freedom of expression and create a more inclusive dialogue between citizens, civil society and the government. "There has to be some separation between the government and the administration," he stressed. He added that a larger domestic observer presence could have improved the process. Drawing from his experience elsewhere in Africa, UNDP resrep Mamadou Mbaye commented, "If leaders can be elected without this essential element, then we would be worried about the future here." Ali-Diabacte reiterated his colleagues' remarks, saying "Five years is not a lot of time; there is a need for dialogue now. I don't see any alternative."

#### Procedural bright spots

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¶12. (C) There were good practices to highlight, according to the UN monitors. Algeria's computerized voter registry was user-friendly and easily accessible in polling stations. If they had not done so before the election, Algerians could present a valid form of identification and obtain a voter card on the spot. Ali-Diabacte added that polling station officials were well trained and quick to address voters' questions. The balloting method itself was simple, inexpensive and effective. Another important election dynamic, Abdool Rahman underscored, was the sense of security and general absence of violence.

#### Comment

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¶13. (C) The disparity between the official turnout figures and what the average person saw on April 9 has caused many people here to scratch their heads at how the government expected to legitimize such an exaggerated turnout figure. In an April 12 editorial, the French-language daily Liberte question whether the inflated turnout wouldn't ultimately

delegitimize the electoral process the government worked so hard to craft. Rather than showing that Algeria is on a path toward greater democracy, the commentator feared that April 9 was more reminiscent of a return to Algeria's one-party system. Meanwhile, while Bouteflika based his third-term platform on continuity, we have heard hints that he is unhappy with the status quo and acknowledges a political system sagging under its own weight (ref C). With civil society and opposition now on the ropes, Bouteflika's control over the system appears secure, albeit with no discernible vision for a progressive political future. Without unveiling such a vision through dialogue between citizens, civil society, opposition parties and government, the fate of the disillusioned 72 percent of Algeria's population under the age of 30 remains in doubt, and with it, the long-term stability of the country. As the UN's Mbaye put it, Algeria is "sitting on a volcano." We will continue to sift for opportunities to support reform, and should be prepared to offer our frank but private opinion of Algeria's progress along the way.

Pearce